



Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care

Volume 1/ Issue 2

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PUBLIC HEARING- WAUSAU, WI

The Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care held its first public hearing on Wednesday, August 23, 2017 in Wausau. The committee heard from local experts, including three agencies that provide Community Response Programs to various counties. This was the first time the committee opened up testimony to the public. A number of former and current foster care parents attended the hearing and shared their experiences working with the foster care system.



Co-Chair Doyle and Co-Chair Snyder

HEARING HIGHLIGHT:

COMMUNITY RESPONSE PROGRAM

The Wausau public hearing put a spotlight on Community Response Programs (CRP). CRP was created in 2006 to fill a gap in child maltreatment prevention services. CRP offers *voluntary* support to families who have been referred to child protective services (CPS) but whose cases were screened out and found to be unsubstantiated. The Department of Children and Families' annual Child Abuse and Neglect Report preliminary findings showed that 25-30% of the families who have been screened out after an initial assessment are re-reported to CPS. The overall goal is to strengthen families, prevent child abuse and neglect, and reduce re-referrals to CPS by providing case management, home visits, goal setting, and flexible funds.

Below are brief descriptions of the testimony provided by the committee's invited speakers. Please reach out to Rep. Snyder's office if you would like full copies of the written testimony.

To begin, the committee heard from the Marathon County Department of Social Services. **Vicki Tylka**, Director, is responsible for administering the child welfare system, which includes foster care for Marathon County residents. Marathon County, like many counties across Wisconsin, is facing significant challenges with the child protective services system. From 2012 to 2015, there was an 80 percent increase in Children in Need of Protection and Services (CHIPS) court petitions. The heroin, opioid, and meth epidemics are all contributing factors for the increasing numbers of CHIPS cases resulting in caseloads for children in out-of-home care rising by 9% in 2017 compared to 2016 numbers.

**MARATHON COUNTY DEPARTMENT
OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

Marathon County Department of Social Services: Community Response Program

Dawn Perez, Child Welfare Manager, discussed Marathon County's Community Response Program. From 2008-2016, Marathon County had 442 families referred to their CRP. Of those 442, 142 declined, 234 participated, and 66 families were unable to participate due to capacity levels. On average, families stayed in the program for 5 months and the county spent \$500 per family. Of those participating families, 14% returned to the system and had their children removed from the home versus 26% of those who did not participate.

Marquette County Department of Human Services

Adams, Green Lake, Marquette, and Waushara Community Response Program

Mandy Stanley, Director, discussed the unique model of the Adams, Green Lake, Marquette and Waushara CRP. This model is a four-county consortium that is funded, in part, through a grant from the Children's Trust Fund. The four-county model has strong relationships and communication with community programs and works to connect participating families to the programs that are available to them within the community, such as Early Head Start, job training, housing resources, etc. Mandy stressed the importance of investing in the front end with prevention and intervention services to families who are at-risk of entering the child welfare system.

Kenosha County Division of Children and Family Services

Kenosha County Prevention Services Network Community Response Program

The Kenosha County Prevention Services Network Community Response Program is an example of a successful public-private partnership. The program is a community-wide collaboration dedicated to strengthening families and helping them become resilient to child abuse and neglect. On average, 99% of families who enroll in Kenosha County's CRP do not receive a substantiated referral while in the program and 95% do not receive one within one year of case closure. The Prevention Service Network is located in the Kenosha County Human Services building, making it a "hub" in the community that is well known to those interested in finding more information about the services available to them in the community.

Start Right

Two representatives from the Marathon County Start Right Program, **Eileen Eckart**, Marathon County Health Department, and **Erica Hoffman**, Children's Hospital-Community Services, spoke on how the program works to prevent child abuse and neglect. The program focuses on developing safe, healthy, school-ready children by connecting the family to community resources that support healthy parenting. Start Right is a partnership between the Marathon County Health Department and Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. The program focuses on the age of the child and the method of parent support by matching them to the appropriate level of support needed for the family.

Forest County Potawatomi Community

James Crawford, Forest County Potawatomi Tribal Secretary, and **Abbey Lukowski**, Forest County Potawatomi Family Services Division Administrator, attended the hearing to speak on the foster care system and the tribal community. One of the issues they addressed was the recruitment and retention of foster parents, resulting in the lack of licensed foster care homes to provide for the increasing number of children needing out-of-home care. They also addressed the lack of skilled foster homes with foster parents who receive training to assist children who require specialized care. They offered suggestions to committee members to make the process less cumbersome for families who are interested in fostering and ways to make education opportunities for skilled foster parents more available.

Sokaogon Chippewa Community

Nicholas Van Zile, Director of Indian Child Welfare, attended the hearing to speak on the issues the Sokaogon Chippewa Community face when working with the child welfare system. Nicholas addressed many of the same issues the committee heard that day, including the need for more educational opportunities for prospective foster parents. He also touched on the challenges those living in rural communities face when considering fostering.



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